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Message Text

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DEPT PLEASE PASS TEHRAN, ADDIS ABABA, KHARTOUM, MOSCOW, HAVANA

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, ET, SA
SUBJECT: SAUDI VIEWS ON ERITREA

REF: STATE 72519

SUMMARY: MFA AFRICAN-ASIAN DIRECTOR SIRAJ TOLD TEHRAN POL COUNS LAMBRAKIS AND EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER THAT SAUDIS WOULD PREFER CONTINUATION OF ERITREAN CONFLICT TO ANY SOLUTION THAT PERMITS ESTABLISHMENT OF MARXIST REGIME ON RED SEA COAST. SAUDIS ARE GIVING NO SUPPORT TO EFLF AND SIRAJ IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT RECENTLY-ANNOUNCED RECONCILIATION. SIRAJ ALSO TOLD OF LONG-RANGE SOVIET PLAN FOR DOMINATION OF AFRICA. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT SIRAJ'S COMMENTS ARE ACCURATE REFLECTION OF OFFICIAL SAUDI VIEWS OF EVENTS IN THE HORN.
END SUMMARY.

1. TEHRAN POLITICAL COUNSELOR LAMBRAKIS AND EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER MADE CALL ON MFA AFRICAN-ASIAN DIRECTOR AHMAD SIRAJ DURING LAMBRAKIS' VISIT ON MARCH 26. DURING THIS MEETING SIRAJ DISCUSSED ERITREA QUESTION AND AFRICAN AFFAIRS IN GENERAL.
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2. SIRAJ EXPECTS ETHIOPIANS WITH SOVIET AND CUBAN SUPPORT TO TURN AGAINST ERITREA NOW THAT OGADEN IS UNDER CONTROL. SAUDIS ARE WORRIED THAT IF COMBINED ETHIOPIAN-CUBAN-SOVIET FORCES ARE ABLE TO ELIMINATE RESISTANCE AND REESTABLISH EHIOPIAN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY OVER ERITREA, THEN A LONG SECTION OF RED SEA COAST WILL BE CONTROLLED BY A

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MARXIST-DOMINATED REGIME. SAUDIS WOULD CONSIDER THIS OUTCOME AS DIRECT THREAT AGAINST THEM AND AS MORE SERIOUS THAN SOMALI DEFEAT IN OGADEN. SIRAJ ADDED THAT HE COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT CUBANS' EARLIER SUPPORT FOR ERITREAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT WOULD NOW RESTRAIN THEM FROM USING THEIR FORCES TO HELP ETHIOPIANS IN ERITREA.

3. SIRAJ SAID THAT HE FAVORED CONTINUATION OF GUERILLA WARFARE IN ERITREA AND OGADEN OVER ANY POLITICAL SOLUTION WHICH WOULD GIVE CUBAN AND USSR PERMANENT FOOTHOLD IN ETHIOPIA. WHEN QUESTIONED FURTHER, SIRAJ SAID THAT HE WOULD EVEN OPPOSE A SOLUTION FAVORABLE TO THE ELF GRANTING CONSIDERABLE AUTONOMY TO THE ERITREANS IF THAT SOLUTION MEANT CONTINUED COMMUNIST PRESENCE IN A PEACEFUL THIOPIA. IMPLICITLY HE ANSWERED QUESTION IN PARAS TWO AND SIX. REFTEL SAYING THAT SAG WILL TRY TO KEEP THINGS STIRRED UP IN ERITREA AND SUPPORT INSURGENCY THERE AS LONG AS IT BELEIVES THAT ESTABLISHMENT OF ETHIOPIAN AUTHORITY ON THE RED SEA COAST WOULD BE A DIRECT THREAT AGAINST SAUDI ARABIA.

4. ON POLITICAL SIDE, SIRAJ SAID THAT RECONCILIATION BE-
TWEEN ELF AND EPLF ANNOUNCED MARCH 24 WILL NOT LAST BECAUSE OF PERSONAL ANIMOSITIES BETWEEN LEADERS OF TWO GROUPS. RECONCILIATION WAS ACCOMPLISHED ONLY TO PLEASE SUDANESE, WHOSE SUPPORT BOTH GROUPS REQUIRE. SAUDIS ARE NOW GIVING CONFIDENTIAL

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NO LSUPPORT TO EPLF, BUT ARE TRYING TO ENCOURAGE COOPERA-
TION BETWEEN AHMAD MOHAMMAD NASER'S ELF AS MILITARY ARM AND OSMAN SALEH SABBE'S PLF AS PLOLITICAL ARM OF ERITREAN MOVEMENT. SIRAJ SAID HE REALIZED THAT SABBE HAD NO MILITARY BACKING BUT ADDED THAT ELF OFR ITS PART LACKED POLITAICAL ACUMEN AND WOULD DO MUCH BETTER COOPERATIING WITH PLF'S POLITICIANS.

5. ACCORDING TO SIRAJ, SAUDIS HAVE URGED PLF POLITICAL LEADERS TO REAISE ERITREAN ISSUE AT UNITED NATIONS WITHIN CONTEXT OF 1952 FEDERATION DECISION. ALTHOUGH UN PROBABLY COULD NOT OFFER IDRECT ASSISTANCE, SIRAJ FELT THAT ERI-
TREANS COULD GET ENOUGH SUPPORT FOR THEIR POSITION WITHIN UN TO GIVE MOVEMENT A LEGAL STATUS.

6. SIRAJ SAID THAT SAG HAD LEARNED "FROM ITS SOURCES" THAT SOVIET ACTIVITY IN THE HORN WAS PART OF AN OVERALL PLAN TO SEIZE CONTROL OF SIX IMPORTANT POINTS IN AFRICA: ETHIOPIA, ANGOLA, WESTERN SAHARA, MOZAMBIQUE, RHODESIA, AND EVENTUALLY SOUTH AFRICA. CONTROL OF THESE AREAS COMBINED WITH ALREADY STRONG SOVIET INFLUENCE IN LIBYA, ALGERIA, GUINEA, AND BENIN WOULD GIVE USSR VIRTUAL

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DOMINATION OF AFRICAN CONTINENT.

7. COMMENT: WHATEVER ONE THINKS OF THIS THEORY, IT IS ACCURATE REFLECTION OF SAUDI GOVERNMENT'S VIEW OF EVENTS IN ETHIOPIA. SIRAJ IS ARTICULATE AND WELL-INFORMED ON AFRICAN MATTERS (ESPECIALLY ON AFFAIRS OF THE HORN). ALTHOUGH SAG'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS MAY SOFTEN SOME OF HIS BLUNT COMMENTS, EMBASSY HAS NO DOUBT THAT SIRAJ'S STATEMENTS CONVEY FAR MORE THAN HIS PERSONAL OPINIONS ABOUT RECENT EVENTS IN AFRICA.
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